

Movie Makers

September-October 2004

Volume 14 No. 5

The American Motion Picture Society

Sponsors of the oldest continuing Film/video Festival in the world.

The American International Film & Video Festival 2004 Results

General Category

First

"On Silk"

Michael Slowe

Second

"Home"

Pat & Brian Deakin

Third

"Elegia"

Geoff Addis

Best entry by an AMPS Member

Member

(More than two years)

"Ann & Celeste - A Docu-drama"

Joyce Axelrod

Student Category

First

"Love Elusive"
Tyler Holtman

Second

"Fingertips"
Chase Holtman

Third

"Unseen"
Tyler Holtman

Best Story

"The Prodigy"
Philip Martin

Best Editing

"On Silk"
Michael Slowe

Best Experimental

"Fingertips"
Chase Holtman

Best Nature

"My Name is George"

James Beach

Best entry from a new
AMPS Member
(Less than two years)

"Home"
Pat & Brian Deakin

Best Foreign Entry

"On Silk"
Michael Slowe
(UK)

Certificates of Merit

"We Fought the Law"

Philip Martin

"Feeding Frenzy"

Mark Levy

"The First Concert"

Dicie & Ken Sizemore

"The Old Merchant's House"

Ephraim Horowitz

"Gerettet"

Oskar Siebert

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Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

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George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909- 1996

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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The Joy of Silent Movies

Matt Jenkins

I has been said that in order to view a projected image three things are needed: a light source, a lense and a viewing environment.

Writings as early as 1589, discuss using a magnifying glass and sunlight. Leonardo da Vinci described what is now known as the camera obscura, an idea where a hole is cut into a wall of a dark room and the image of the outside world is projected on a wall upside down.

Development of the projected image has been vastly improved since then. However, the idea of plunking down good money to watch flickering lights on a wall in a dark room with people you wouldn't speak to in daylight remains the same today as it did a hundred years ago. We love our movies. We sympathize with the characters and we idolize them. Film and television are potent attention-getters, in fact so much we see government's throughout the world controlling content.

At Cameron University I teach an Aesthetics of Film Workshop and we explore film genre chronologically. So we start with silent film. After the course is completed, students fill out an evaluation. The majority of the comments indicating a questioning of why they must look at old films why can't they study films made today. My response is that the filmmakers of today

studied these films they liberated ideas from them to use in today's films.

Films of the silent era show us the path to filmmaking today. So here are some reasons why we should consider silent film. The silent era is really the time of the careful shaping of Hollywood as one of the worlds' Centers of Film" and the development of the Hollywood style of filmmaking.

American filmmaking was really born in the NYC, New Jersey area. Edison's people develop filmmaking as something to help market the phonograph. The well-known silent director, D.W. Griffith shot his first picture "The Adventures of Dollie" in Connecticut in 1903. Ten years later filmmaking shifted coasts. Some suggested that the weather is a factor. A film company could produce all year long in Hollywood. However, perhaps it is more for the reason that Edison would hire thugs through the "trust" to bring harm to those moviemakers who chose to use equipment produced by other than Edison.

The silent era is also known for the development of the Hollywood style. Style can be defined in a couple of ways. First the idea of Hollywood itself. It is a magical playground where people go to be discovered. Even today when one thinks of glitter and stars and movie making, its Hollywood that comes to mind even though more films per year are produced in India than in Hollywood.

By 1915 movie stars are being groomed. During the silent era the

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The 2004 AMPS Festival.

Some rambling thoughts.

Ned Cordery

The image quality of the entries was generally excellent although it is easy to tell the difference between work originated on DV and analog. The majority of entries were on DVD and we experienced no problems playing them with the exception of the PAL to NTSC transcoded DVDs. One of the winners would play on the computer but not on the regular DVD players (not even the famous Sungale) although the opening screen and the button appeared. We were able to see the source files so the MPEG2 file, which was genuine NTSC at 29.97 fps, was imported into Vegas 5; however the sound would not go over, so the sound file was opened in Sonar, converted to a .wav file and then reassembled with the picture and recorded out to DVD, we would rather not have to do this (but thanks Alberto)!! Other transcoded DVDs showed motion artifacts and we asked the makers to send a PAL version. Next year we plan to accept PAL entries on DVD and miniDV, this will eliminate the problems of transcoding and make it easier for our International entrants and for the judges. The quality of the presentation of the DVDs was impressive, obviously direct printing on DVD is now widespread and opening screens were very good, one DVD had a

paper label but we had no problem playing it. Other formats received were VHS, SVHS and miniDV.

In some cases the sound recording/edit was not as good as the picture recording/edit, the commonest fault being failure to fade down the sound under the picture after the titles and get a balanced mix of music/ambient with narration. The on-camera mic leaves much to be desired and the use of a separate mic for live sound will deliver better quality and a boom mount or a shot gun mic will give better selectivity. Sound is half the story and most people have the image quality and edit well under control but miss out on the sound, remember the quote that should be above every editor's work bench, "the images deliver the information but the sound creates the emotion".

The majority of entries were categorized as Documentary and we will review the possibility of dividing this into at least two categories. Documentary and Travel - what do you think?

The student entry this year was small but impressive with original ideas and good technical skills although in some cases their aim exceeded their reach, but go for it! We may have to subdivide the Student category between High School students and others although the HS entries were very good and were winners.

The closing date is the closing date! We set the closing date late this year so we did not have much time between closing and the Convention with all the office work to be completed so we

could not accept late entries. International mail particularly is subject to delays at the customs and even domestic mail seems to travel slowly these days so we ask next year's entrants to allow at least seven working days for domestic delivery and two weeks for international air mail. Please package well, most entries arrived in good shape but two unprotected VHS tapes were virtually destroyed, we were able to recover only one of them by careful transfer to DV for viewing.

Elsewhere there is a complete list of the winners, here is a selection of the judge's comments on the top entries:

"On Silk" Stunning photography translated into a superb film by fine editing with appropriate music perfectly supporting the pictorial action. Well narrated. This film flowed like the artist's colors from his brush. Very informative, constantly interesting, a work of art.

"Ann & Celeste" A story of anorexia and a friendship that weathers the stresses and strains this illness brings with it. This is an important story well told, the structure is very good with well chosen images and appropriate comments and narration where necessary. The music is appropriate and fits the images. A fine achievement.

"Love Elusive" A very enjoyable film. Obviously a good script to work from supported by good camerawork and an outstanding music selection. The acting was variable with excellent performances by the nerd and the girl and a less convincing perform-

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Amateur versus Independent or where to from here?

Ned Cordery

First I would like to preface my presentation by wishing Roger Garetson a speedy recovery, I had looked forward to meeting him in person to thank him for his dedication to AMPS and all his hard work in supporting these Festivals and creating the new AMPS website. Hope we see you next year, Roger. My thanks also to the Directors of AMPS who have contributed to the rethinking of our organization and particularly to Matt Jenkins, the editor of our newsletter, Movie Makers. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Brian Gubler, an AMPS Director who has resigned as a Director for health reasons but remains a member, thanks Brian.

In your programme this presentation is titled Amateur versus Independent, that is because I was asked for the title before the presentation was prepared and if I remember correctly Roger came up with that one anyway. I have also added a sub title "Where to from Here?"

My definition of an independent filmmaker is one who works outside the traditional structure of the film industry, this world has exploded with the advent of the digital video formats; and there is no other word for it. The result is a rash of what they call low budget films aimed at some form of revenue generating release.

Independent film making is driven by money in exactly the same way that Hollywood is and books and articles in magazines are devoted to suggesting ways of raising money, of special deals with SAG actors, how to attach a big name to your production and so on to the point where the currency of Independent film has been devalued by it becoming the low cost branch of Hollywood with Miramax in the wings picking up anything that looks promising.

Read the list of people attending Sundance and they are the same as those at the Academy awards with a sprinkling of unknowns.

This is hardly pure film making, most of the makers are preparing calling cards so that they can get their hands on the really big budgets with the major studios. There are a few honorable exceptions, but they are few.

Meanwhile the amateur, or as I prefer, non-commercial film making world is suffering from declining membership and interest. Long established clubs are closing their doors.

The number of entries into the Festivals and competitions run by AMPS, AMMA and the Ten Best of the West are declining.

If this were a phenomenon peculiar to N America then it would be bad but this is also the case in the UK and many of the established centers of non-commercial film making in continental Europe and S America where many of the clubs are in crisis.

I have written on this subject in the AMPS Newsletter and suggested some of the causes and some of the possible remedies.

The non-commercial film maker is the purest of film makers with no financial motive, no master to serve, no time constraints, no need to play to the audience. Free to deliver a message or not, explore the totally uncommercial worlds that other film maker's by-pass or to just have fun making movies.

So why is this wonderful art form in decline, this engaging hobby, past time even obsession, slowly fading?

One of the problems we face is the growing blurring of the boundary between the amateur and the professional and the difficulty of categorizing film makers into those dated definitions.

If a filmmaker makes 20 wedding videos a year and earns enough money to cover the costs of the equipment in my opinion this person is indisputably a professional, similarly a filmmaker who makes videos about antique airplanes and sells them from his website is also a professional, and so is the teacher of film and video and the supplier of equipment and materials.

However we are all non-commercial, or amateur if you prefer, filmmakers when we make films for fun. At AMPS we define the film, not its makers, as commercial or non-commercial.

Do not imagine that the professional has some great advan-

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tage in this area; remember what Stan Brakhage said,

"The so called professional's worst handicap is that their knowledge sets into them and concretizes their thought thus blocking them from creative adventure"

I know the old argument that admission of professionals will let Steven Spielberg in and he will win everything, do not believe it, given the vagaries of judging he will certainly come last and there will be heavy criticism of his film. If he does enter what a wonderful coup for the non-commercial film movement!

So much for the preamble, the other part of the title is "Where do we go from here"

Let me put forward one possibility for the future of non-commercial film worked out with my long time co-worker, Alberto Kniepkamp and our wives and several non film making friends.

It is many years since I belonged to a cine/video club but they were typically dominated by men, all of whom owned cameras so these were really cine/video camera owners clubs and camera ownership was the essential credential for entry and that was how I joined my first cine club, after I purchased my first camera.

Many members were skilled and resourceful cinematographers, a few were editors and sound mixers and a very few; makers of films that had something to say.

The advent of digital video, non linear editing, automatically syn-

chronous sound (remember the nightmare of recording and editing synch sound with 8mm?) and other new technologies have placed in the hands of the non-commercial film maker the tools to deliver quality equal to that achieved by the professional film maker and in fact we now share many of the tools of contemporary film making with professionals.

For example, the feature film "Cold Mountain" was edited on Final Cut Pro, a program readily accessible to many of us here. Although there are computer generated images in the film the cutting and transitions are very simple and could have been done on any basic editing program.

However, there is one element in this new world that is not technology dependent, does not require a 3 GHz processor, a 250 gigabyte hard drive or a camera with 700 lines of resolution and is present in abundance in Cold Mountain.

This element is a technology independent quality as old as time, quite simply - creativity.

Creativity may be defined as the ability to make something new from disparate parts and ideas.

Artistic creativity is the ability to make something that addresses the human condition, that entertains, challenges, interests, amuses, informs and in some way reaches out and stirs our emotions. Those old story tellers who sat by the fire and enthralled their audiences with tales of ancient heroes, of how the world began and what the stars were all about knew ex-

actly how to tell their tales and we are their inheritors.

The world of film making (in this I include video and whatever the future may deliver) is made up of three groups of people, the audience, the technicians and the creatives.

At sometime or another we are all members of the audience, some of us are also technicians of varying skill levels but always striving to improve our abilities, and in our world of film the creatives are the directors, writers, actors, musicians.

I know that cinematographers, editors, sound mixers, and other crafts can rise to the level of art and it adds much to the end result if they do; but their main function is to deliver the vision of those who write, direct and act.

Given this need for a wide range of skills we felt that the traditional club with its emphasis on technology was too limiting so we created Halcyon Daze Productions with a core of technicians, plus actors, writers, a set designer, a musician and people with potential film related skills that they want to develop.

What we have in common is that we are all of retirement age, some still gainfully employed, some working on the projects they have waited years to get to, all busy people.

We do not have formal meetings; but creative discussions as and when required to prepare productions. People are free to make suggestions and change their roles provided we all agree that they can do it.

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ance by the tough guy. Some wonderful moments, serenading with the boom box and the subsequent exchange were outstanding.

"Fingertips" A riot of well executed creativity. I thoroughly enjoyed this trip which is full of originality and humor.

"My name is George" Enjoyable story of a desert tortoise. Good low level camera angles, well written and delivered commentary, sharper editing and transitions would improve an all ready accomplished piece.

"Home" The excellent camera work and well paced narration reveal a deep understanding of the subject and invite the viewer to participate in the experience of the guide. Very intimate and enjoyable, a fine achievement.

"Prodigy" A believable story of a boy day dreaming of being a world chess champion after watching his brothers play chess. A good script, tight editing and very fine compositing all come together to produce a very fine film.

Mark Levy and the one liner, many n-c film makers like the short humorous subject and sadly most of them fail at it, Mark does not. After we picked ourselves up from the floor and dried the tears of laughter we set about analyzing how he does it and came to the following conclusions. First his films are immaculately shot, sound recorded and edited, secondly, he has high production values, if the setting is a supermarket then he shoots in a real, fully operational supermarket, thirdly, the

acting is excellent and finally he gets to the point and does not hang about. It's all in the timing and he knows exactly how to do it. However, his films pose a problem for the judges as they are difficult to fit into the existing categories, is a one minute, one line joke a story? So next year we will introduce a category for short (less than 5 minutes) humor; so who is willing to challenge Mark at his own game?

How should we handle films longer than 15 minutes? This time limit seemed to work well but there are many people making much longer films who feel excluded, one suggestion is that the judges view the first x (15?) minutes and then decide what to do, what do you think? Should we extend the time for next year's Festival; 20 minutes, 30 minutes, no limit? Your comments and suggestions welcome.

In summary, the modern DV camera and non-linear edit system are the tools that deliver amazing quality and the n-c filmmaker can concentrate on the creativity confident that it won't all fall apart in an almost impossible post production. Sound is the present weak spot but increasing experience and practice will surely improve this. DVD is the way to go for distribution, high quality, easy to handle, space saving and now close to the cost of VHS tape (cheaper than SVHS and miniDV). Thanks to all the entrants for sharing their hard work with us.

Same time next year!

Ned Cordery

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idea of movie stars are being developed in order to increase box office revenues. Actors assume personas designed for them by publicity departments.

Since silent films had no speaking in them, there war a lot more international distribution of pictures. Simply change the intertitles to the language of the country you wished to send the picture and it would be appreciated by the audience there.

The silent era also was the time of development of filmmaking as a story telling art and a craft. The earliest films simply captured everyday occurrences, much to the amazement of audiences. However the novelty of "flickers" soon wore off and filmmaker discovered that audiences enjoyed fictional scenarios. By the advent of sound stories and intricate camera usage and editing had been developed.

By 1922 40 million Americans went to the Movies. It was a huge industry.

However, in 1929, the coming of sound was done in response to a slump in the industry. Warner Brothers – at the time a failing movie company, had nothing to lose by investing in sound. While the advent of sound was embraced by the audience, sound was not welcomed by much of the filmmaking establishment.

Interesting enough we see that Hollywood was slow to embrace technology all through recent history. When TV becomes a force, movie studios don't to sell

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We have a clear statement of objectives:

"Halcyon Daze Productions is a group of friends of retirement age who are interested in using film/video in both narrative and documentary formats to examine the issues of retirement and ageing. We work with local actors and helpers and are grateful for the locations made available by local businesses and organizations. Our films are self-funded and made for the pleasure of the creative work with no expectation of reward or commercial exploitation."

We have set ourselves the target of making four films a year, we are not aiming to work in any specific genre and we have six projects in development, two narrative films, two documentaries and two experimental films. It is interesting that after our first production new script ideas have come from actors and a general helper with no previous film making experience so we are tapping new creative resources.

We will be entering our films in non-commercial Festivals around the world but above all we have a lot of fun working on them.

So much for the theory, I am sure you don't want to hear me rabbiting on for the next forty minutes so let me show you our first production, Red Rock Blues; in its world premiere,

After the film I will try to answer any questions.

(Show film 39 minute version)

(Q&A session)

There has to be a new paradigm for the future of the non-commercial film and I have suggested just one possibility. As high speed connections on the internet become more accessible and affordable then there will no doubt be an explosion of streaming video and I am sure there will be developments we haven't even imagined.

We should share our productions across the world of non-commercial film making with round robins and Festivals such as this. We can set up a web of advisors and writers on the Internet, the possibilities are there and this is not about age or experience it is about the shared thrill of making a film.

My thanks to all the participants in Halcyon Daze Productions, to Stuart Rumens who did this forty years ago with Anglia Film Repertory and particularly to my wife Mary who has put up with 45 years of my nonsense, raised a family, managed our business, taken the still photographs and tirelessly held the microphone boom.

This is a great time to be a film maker.

Thanks.

(Stan Brakhage was a great visual film maker with an eye for shape and movement. He made over 400 films and taught at the Chicago Art Institute and the University of Colorado at Boulder. He died last year here in Victoria at the age of 70. Many of his films are available on DVD. He was a non-commercial experimentalist with an original take on film and its audience.)

TEN BEST OF THE WEST – 2004 AWARDS – FINAL

David Fuller, Contest Chair

Particle Man by Chase Holtman Calif.

Love Elusive by Tyler Holtman Calif.

To Touch the Sky with Wings on High by Lucy Colson English Calif.

Ann & Celeste: A Docudrama by Joyce Axelrod Calif.

Louis, Meet Louis by Louis Lancer B.C.

Sisters by Walt & Pamela Gilmore Calif.

The Easy Life by David Fuller B.C.

Superboy Saves the Day by Jim Babchuk B.C.

China by Walt & Pamela Gilmore Calif.

The Revelation by Patrick Sheridan B.C.

JUDGES SPECIAL AWARDS

Love Elusive by Tyler Holtman Calif

Recycle by Ron Chappell B.C.

Signpost Lund by Edna Breckenridge B.C.

My Name is George by Jim Beach Calif.

Other Titles Movie Maker

<i>Phoebe's Fix</i>	Margaret Chamberlain, B.C.
<i>A Taste of Auckland</i>	Dicie Sizemore Calif.
<i>The Day of the Iguana</i>	Bernie Wood Calif.
<i>The Little Boat that Could</i>	Ron Rennie Calif.
<i>The Wing</i>	Stan Whitsitt Calif.
<i>A Rave Review</i>	Margaret Chamberlain B.C.
<i>This Land is Our Land</i>	Jean Rawlings B.C.
<i>Windmills of Your Mind</i>	Ron Rennie Calif.
<i>Victoria's Crystal Garden</i>	Eleanor Haire B.C.
<i>Unseen</i>	Tyler Holtman Calif.
<i>Welcome Again, Veterans</i>	Jean Rawlings B.C.
<i>Sure Cure</i>	Ron Cure B.C.
<i>Victoria's Beacon Hill</i>	Eleanor Haire B.C.
<i>San Francisco Joy Ride</i>	George McLachlan B.C.
<i>Featherdale Wildlife Park</i>	Edna Breckenridge B.C.
<i>Painful Expressions</i>	Chase Holtman Calif.
<i>Looking for Signs</i>	David Fuller B.C.
<i>The First Concert</i>	Dicie Sizemore Calif.
<i>Blueberries</i>	Victoria Video Club B.C.
<i>Galway & Beyond</i>	George McLachlan B.C.

September 2004

Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Hosted by: Victoria Video Club

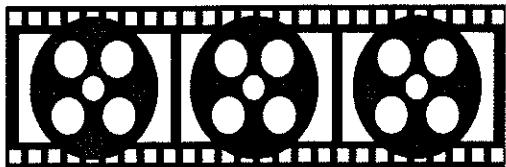
(Closing remarks)

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product to TV or allow their stars to appear on TV, now TV is an important part of the marketing and revenue strategy.

The advent of the VCR was met by a copyright infringement lawsuit by Disney and Universal against SONY. What do you think Disney's largest market is today? Home video.

Filmmakers need to study the silent era, great ideas exist there and it is where American filmmaking really matured.



From:
American Motion Picture Society
30 Kanan Road
Oak Park, California
91377-1105

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I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker) \$ 10.00

Dues Canada: (includes. - Movie Maker) \$ 12.00

Dues-Foreign: (includes - Movie Maker) \$13.00

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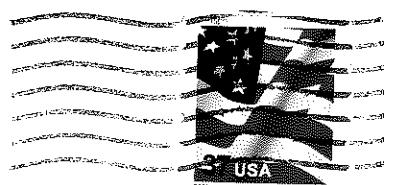
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